

OCTOBER 8 - DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ERIK THE RED.

U.S. President Johnson declared October 9th of every year to be Leif Erikson Day

Erik the Red is commonly recalled in the popular press as the father of Leif Erikson. Each October, as the U.S.A. gets ready to celebrate Columbus Day, jaded newspaper reporters and the Norwegian ethnic organizations remind us that, after all, the sailor from Genoa was about five hundred years too late. Lucky Leif gets the spotlight, but standing not far back in the shadows is that old rogue, Erik.

What was so special about Erik? Besides the passing on of exceptionally fine genes to his sons, he roared through Scandinavia with deeds destined to make his saga a wash of color and drama. Exiled from land to land for his volatile temper, he had a way of making his neighbors uneasy. This didn't do much for community calm, but it did lead to the settlement of Greenland by the Vikings - and thus set the stage for Leif's spectacular voyage.

Erik was a dedicated follower of Thor. He stayed loyal to his blustery God even when his wife converted to Christianity and wouldn't sleep with him anymore. I don't imagine Erik went without a bedmate - and his wife got a little chapel, built right over the hill where her heathen husband wouldn't have to see it when he looked out of the house.

Short Biography of Erik the Red Thorvaldsson

Greenland is said to have been discovered by a man called Gunnbjörn whose ship had gone off course. It was, however, Eiríkr Þorvaldsson (a.k.a. Eric the Red) who explored and named the island, and ruled the first colony of settlers. He was born in Norway in the mid-10th century, but went to Iceland as a child after his father was banished from Norway. A violent man, as he was, Eiríkr himself was banished from Iceland, and set forth on an expedition westward from Iceland. In 982 he got to Greenland (a name he gave to encourage settlers to go there), and spent the next three years exploring it. After that he returned to Iceland and led an expedition of 25 ships to settle (circa 986) in southwestern Greenland. This settlement survived until the late 15th century. Eiríkr himself settled at Brattahlíð (Tunigdliarfik) in Greenland, where he died sometime after the year 1000.

The most important written sources recounting the discovery and settlement of Greenland are Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* and *Landámabók*. There are also two colorful sagas, *Grænlendinga Saga* (The Saga of the Greenlanders) and *Eiríks saga rauða* (The Saga of Eric the Red), but these were composed only in the early 13th century and are often fanciful and contradict each other in places.

A serious quarrel erupted between Erik the Red-haired and his neighbors on Iceland. In the fight that followed, Erik was responsible for the death of two men. He was convicted of manslaughter, pronounced an outlaw, and exiled from Iceland for three years. To stay meant possible death as, once convicted, anyone on Iceland was allowed to legally kill him. In 980-81, Eric therefore decided to explore land sighted by his friend Gunnbjörn Úlfsson to the west of Iceland. The course Eric followed took him to the island he named Greenland.